THE
PAGAN
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Handbook for Chaplains

Sections concerning Wicca, and Paganism

Unites States Army

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INTRODUCTION:

"OTHER" GROUPS

The groups considered in this section manifest the wide variety of religious options available in the U.S. They draw upon several distinct religious impulses, each with a long heritage.

METAPHYSICAL GROUPS

One can trace within the Western religion an alternative tradition which might be termed mystical, Platonic, or idealistic. This tradition emerged in force in the nineteenth century in philosophical idealism which in America became visible in the movement called Transcendentalism. What has been termed the Metaphysical movements in America represent a blossoming of this old alternative tradition in the atmosphere of religious freedom and relative secularity of nineteenth century America. The three main branches of metaphysical religion emerged in the nineteenth century as Spiritualism, Theosophy, and New Thought. Each affirmed the reality of a spiritual reality of which the visible material world was but a pale reflection.

Spiritualism was built around the belief in the possibility of contacting the spiritual world, specifically the spirits of the departed, through the use of the talents of very special people called mediums. Spiritual became a fad in the 1850s and then settled into a quieter existence as a new religious movement. The Universal Church of the Master described below is a typical Spiritualist group.

Theosophy grew out of spiritualism but directed its contact to a more evolved group of spiritual being who comprise what was thought of as the Spiritual Hierarchy of the cosmos. These masters spoke to the leaders of the Theosophical Society which became the source of a number of groups as new claims to contact with the Masters were put forth. The "I AM" Religious Activity and the Church Universal and Triumphant are two contemporary groups which have claimed contact with the Spiritual Hierarchy through their founder/leaders.

New Thought grew directly out of Christian Science. Christian Science had asked the question of healing within the context of an idealist philosophical framework. New Thought, begun by one of Mary Baker Eddy's students, Emma Curtis Hopkins, differed from Christian Science at first over organizational disputes, but has during the twentieth century developed in various new perspectives which have taken it some distance form Christian Science. The United Church of Religious Science is one form of New Thought (as is the Unity School of Christianity considered in the first section of this manual).

PSYCHIC GROUPS

From ancient times, people have claimed powers of mind and spirit far surpassing those recognized by modern science. In years past, these phenomena (e.g., spiritual healing, telepathy, clairvoyance, mind over matter) were termed "supernatural; they are now known as "psychic," and studied by scientists.

The growth of psychic practitioners led to the development of psychical research. The British Society for Psychical Research was established in 1880, and the American Society in 1882. In studying psychic phenomena, Dr. Rhine of Duke University coined the term "extra-sensory perception (ESP)" and helped make "parapsychology" a discipline of study. The growth of parapsychology, including its membership in the American Association for the Advancement of Science, provided a dynamic base upon which psychic groups could build.

Religious groups with an essential element of belief and practice in psychic phenomena, including the Church of Scientology and the Foundation Faith of the Millennium, continue the older metaphysical tradition and cannot be sharply distinguished from the older metaphysical groups. In general, they believe in the reality of the phenomena studied by parapsychologists. They usually offer members various ways to develop their powers, and some have members with special abilities which can be used by individuals to aid in dealing with personal problems.

There are several hundred psychically-oriented bodies in the U.S. The two considered here grow out of this general background, and are not directly related to other bodies.

MAGICK

Magick (not "magic," which is considered a stage performer's art and not a religion) groups have experienced considerable growth since the 1960s. These groups are distinguished by their use of occult practices (astrology and divination) and magick (the ability to willfully change the world by manipulating the cosmic forces). While like the psychic dimension, magick is as old as known history. Its contemporary revival, however, began in the early 1900s.

The most popular form of magical religion Neo-Paganism is a nature-oriented religion based on the worship of the male-female polarity, the observance of the agricultural seasons, and magic. Worship of the male-female aspects of nature usually is expressed as allegiance to the Horned God and the Great Mother Goddess. Ritual follows the movement of the sun and moon. Neo-Pagans see themselves as reviving the pre-Christian religion of Europe and the Mediterranean Basin and manifest as Norse, Druid, or Egyptian in format. By far the Wiccans compose the largest segment of the neo-Pagan community. Wicca or Witchcraft is derived from the ancient Paganism practiced in Western Europe, especially the British Isles.

Magick, an essential element in modern Wicca, seeks mastery of all the cosmic forces believed to control the world. Witches believe in the ancient principal of "as above, so below," and in their worship seek to create a microcosm, a magical image of the whole. The universe is generally viewed as a sphere. The magical circle, drawn at the beginning of all magical rituals, is the outline of the microcosm intersecting the floor.

Witchcraft had grown slowly until the repeal of the last of England's anti-witchcraft laws in the 1950s. Growth accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. There are no less than thirty different Wicca groups and hundreds of independent covens functioning in the United States. The Gardnerians are one of several modern Wicca groups. They trace their history to Gerald B. Gardner who initiated the current Wiccan revival. However, most Wiccans now follow an eclectic practice which values creativity and is constantly changing and altering ritual while remaining within the basic nature Goddess orientation.

During the 1980s many Neo-Pagans and Wiccans joined the Armed Forces. Recently they have formed a network to assist in their relating to the military. The Network may be contacted through its newsletter, Pagan Military Newsletter, 829 Lynn Haven Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA 23452.

Secrecy is a major element of the existence of both Witchcraft and Satanism (discussed below). Secrecy is protective (known members often lose their jobs, friends or status), and serves to guard the sacred mysteries of the group.

SATANISM

Often confused with Neo-Paganism and Wicca, Satanism is the worship of Satan (also known as Baphomet or Lucifer). Classical Satanism, often involving "black masses," human sacrifice, and other sacrilegious or illegal acts, is now rare. Modern Satanism is based on both the knowledge of ritual magic and the "anti-establishment" mood of the 1960s. It is related to classical Satanism more in image than substance, and generally focuses on "rational self-interest with ritualistic trappings." Modern Satanism began with the Church of Satan, founded by Anton LaVey in 1966. From it, in the 1970s, several groups emerged and quickly disappeared. The Temple of Set is the only substantive offshoot to survive into the 1980s.

Modern Satanists have found it relevant to distinguish themselves from what is termed contemporary devil-worship. By Devil-worship is meant the various informal activities which have appeared in the 1980s around teenage use of Satanic symbols, killings of serial killers professing to have been worshipping the Devil, and various reports of "Satanic" crime. Modern Satanists (i.e., the Church of Satan and Temple of Set) profess a pro-life philosophy and do not condone illegal action by people affiliated with those organizations.

INDIVIDUALLY DISTINCTIVE GROUPS

Within the variety of American religion are a number of groups which are highly individual in nature. That is, while their origins can often be traced to any number of the major world religions, they have developed beliefs, systems, or structures which are considerably different from those traditions.

Several of the groups discussed in this section fall within this general framework: the Baha'i Faith, the Native American Church, and the Universal Life Church.

Baha'i is a major new faith built on the revelations given to several Persian mystics of the 19th century. While growing on an Islamic base, it has moved to a more universal outlook.

The Native American Church is one of many that uses psychedelic substances as a visionary aid and sacramental element. They are distinctive in being both the oldest and the only one with government sanction to use the designated drugs.

The Universal Life Church represents a response to the religious freedom in America by individuals with a strong independent strain in their religious thought.

The Universal Life Church has spawned a number of similar church bodies including the Crown of Life Fellowship, the Life Science Church, the Calvary Grace Church and the Brotherhood of Peace and Tranquility.

Rastafarian are a new religion developed in Jamaica in the early twentieth century and imported to America in recent decades. It draws on themes familiar from Black Judaism and Black Islam, but is distinct from both.

Finally, Vajradhatu is a Buddhist group, but out of a Tibetan rather than a Japanese tradition.

GARDNERIAN WICCA

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OTHER NAMES BY WHICH KNOWN: Witchcraft; Paganism; Neo-Paganism

LEADERSHIP: No formal leader

MEMBERSHIP: Not reported.

HISTORICAL ORIGIN: Witchcraft or Wicca is a reconstruction of the Old Religion, the tribal worship of ancient peoples based in magic, herbology, healing, and the worship (primarily) of the Mother Goddess and (secondarily) her consort, the Horned God. Witches believe they have existed throughout known history in many parts of the world. The term "witch," more properly "wicca," comes from the Anglo Saxon word for "wise." Wicca's marked revival in the 14th Century is due largely to the work of such scholars as Margaret A. Murray, who traced the existence of the Old Pagan Religion in pre-historic Europe. At the forefront of this revival was Gerald Gardner, the famous witch of the Isle of Man.

After years in the East, Gardner returned to England in the 1930s, located a Wicca group, and was initiated by "Old Dorothy" Clutterbuck. He participated in the "Operation Cone of Power" during World War II, in which English witches joined their magical energies with the prayers of all other religious groups to turn back Hitler's invasion of England. In 1949, he published High Magic's Aid, a novel about Medieval Wicca based on his growing knowledge of 14th Century Witchcraft. After repeal of the last anti-Witchcraft law in Britain in 1951, Gardner became publicly prominent. He opened a Museum of Witchcraft on the Isle of Man, and in 1954 published Witchcraft Today in which he attacked the idea that Wicca was the worship of Satan and declared himself a witch, devoted to the Mother Goddess. As a result, many witches associated with him and other people contacted him to join the Craft. Those who associated with Gardner, who shared his views of Wicca, and who started to use the rituals he used have come to be called "Gardnerians."

Gardnerian witchcraft was brought to the U.S. by Lady Rowena and her High Priest Robat from England in 1962. Raised in the Church of England, they began to read books on the Craft and eventually to correspond with Gardner. They traveled to the Isle of Man a number of times and were fully initiated, then began to form covens in the United States.

BASIC BELIEFS: Garnerians worship the Mother Goddess and also the Horned God, symbols of the basic male/female polarity of all nature. They seek the balance within themselves, and with their environment. Worship is often done in pairs, masculine and feminine, and the power which is produced by magical ritual is directed by the High Priestess for its desired purpose. While devotion to the Wiccan deities is the main coven activity, magic, the control and use of natural cosmic forces which emanate from the human mind and body, is the secondary activity of the coven. It is done for healing and for aiding members in various endeavors. Most Witches believe in reincarnation; i.e., that the soul or spirit of the individual will progress through a number of subsequent Earthly lives as it evolves. Retribution for acts in this life will be returned threefold, good or evil, in this life. A reincarnated spirit starts afresh.

Contrary to popular media representations, the Wiccan neither worships nor believes in "the Devil," "Satan," or any other similar entities. They point out that "Satan" is a belief associated with the Judaeo-Christian Tradition, while the Wiccan beliefs are based upon a pagan mythos which predates the Judaeo-Christian era.

One book used by Gardnerian Wicca is authoritative: The book of Shadows, or book of ritual. In the Gardnerian tradition, these are hand copied from High Priestess to High Priestess. Each High Priestess then shares the information with her coven. They are part of the traditional teachings of the

Craft, and are available only to initiates. From coven to coven, the rituals vary slightly. The Gardnerian tradition is an evolved and evolving tradition. Hence, each coven will start with the materials passed on to its High Priestess, and then experiment with new emphases, magical formulas and rituals. The books of Janet and Stewart Farrar (Eight Sabbats for Witches, The Witches' Way, The Witches' Goddess, and The Witches' God) are the best currently available sources on Traditional Wicca. For eclectic Wicca, the best source is Star hawk's The Spiral Dance. Margot Adler's Drawing~ Down the Moon is a useful survey of the larger neo-Pagan movement.

PRACTICES AND BEHAVIORAL STANDARDS: Gardnerian Witches live by the Wiccan Rede: "An Ye Harm None, Do As Ye Will." Within this general concept is the Law of Retribution, by which witches can expect to receive threefold return on their actions.

Social forces generally do not yet allow witches to publicly declare their religious faith without fear of reprisals such as loss of job, ridicule, etc. Rituals, many teachings, and even acknowledgement of affiliation with the Craft are generally not discussed with non-initiates. Ritual instruments are generally hidden and protected.

Eight sabbats, or festivals, important for witches to gather and attune themselves to natural rhythms and forces as the seasons change, are followed: February Eve (January 31), Spring Equinox (March 21), Beltane or May Eve(April 30), Summer Solstice or Midsummer (June 22), Lammas (July 31), Autumn Equinox (September 21), Samhain (October 31) and Yule or Winter Solstice (December 21).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: Each coven is autonomous, headed by a High Priestess and her High Priest. Covens vary in size from approximately 8 to 14 members. The High Priestess heads the coven. The High Priestess who trained her is recognized as a Queen to whom she can turn for counsel and advice, thus maintaining a lineage of High Priestesses throughout Gardnerian Wicca. Members pass through three initiations, each of which is normally at least a year and a day apart.

ROLE OF MINISTERS: The High Priestess and her High Priest are responsible for coven activities, serving both as leaders in the rituals and as teachers for coven members. A High Priestess, or a woman she has delegated, can cast a circle.

WORSHIP: Wiccans usually worship as a group. Individual worship is possible, but not generally practiced. Worship takes place in a private location in which a circle can be drawn according to prescribed ritual formulas. Covens meet either weekly or bi-weekly (at the full and new moon), always in the evening. Worship in some (but not all) groups occurs in the nude.

Minimum items for worship include an athame (ritual knife), a bowl of water, a censer with incense, salt, an altar and 6 candles in candlesticks. A sword and pentacle (talisman) are optional. All tools must be ritually consecrated by a High Priestess.

DIETARY LAWS OR RESTRICTIONS: None

FUNERAL AND BURIAL REQUIREMENTS: None. Recognition of the death of a coven member takes place in the coven, apart from the "body" of the deceased. Ritual tools or material found among the remains of the deceased should be immediately returned to members of the coven. It is not necessary for a priest or priestess to be present at the time of death.

MEDICAL TREATMENT: No restrictions, but Wiccans may want co-religionists to do healing rituals in the hospital in tandem with medical treatment. So members of patient's Circle should be permitted ICU visits as though they were immediate family.

OTHER: With respect to attitude toward service in the armed forces, members include the full range from career military personnel to conscientious objectors.

Wicca is open toward other faiths, recognizing that the Principles of the Great Mother appears in a great many faiths under various names and symbolisms. Because of the persecutions of past years, Wiccans take a guarded relation to groups which claim to possess "The Truth" or to be the "Only Way." Wicca is only one path among many, and is not for everyone. Members are encouraged to learn about all faiths, and are permitted to attend services of other faiths, should they desire to do so.

GENERAL SOURCE BOOKS:

Margot Adler. Drawing Down the Moon. Boston: Beacon Press, 2nd, ed., 1986. 595pp.

Janet and Stewart Farrar. Eight Sabbats for Witches. London: Robert Hale, 1981. 192pp.

The Witches' Way. London: Robert Hale, 1984. 349pp.

The Witches' Goddess. Custer,WA: Phoenix Publishing,1987. 319pp.

The Witches' God. Custer, WA: Phoenix, 1989. 278pp.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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Because of the autonomy of each coven and the wide variance of specific ritual practices, the best contact person would be the High Priestess or other leader of the member's home coven.

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